

# “Hope is the greatest whore”: Hope, critique, and management studies in Irena Haiduk’s artwork

## *Unplugged - Voices*

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Research in management and organization may only gain by being inspired from arts, culture and humanities in order to rethink practices but also to nourish its own perspectives. Life in organizations is artificially separate from ordinary life: all of mundane objects are thus conducive to astonishment, inspiration, and even problematization. The unplugged subsection “voices” gives the opportunity to academics and non-academics to deliver an interpretation about an object from the cultural or artistic world. Interpreted objects are or not directly related to organizational life, resonate or not with the moment, but share some intriguing features. These interpretations suggest a patchwork of variations on the same object.

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“Polite art is as revolutionary as an annual budget.”  
(Ireana Haiduk, *Bon Ton Mais Non*, 2013)

To call the work by artist Irena Haiduk polite art would be an offense. At least to her. She is an uncompromising artist, a sharp observer with no tolerance for hypocrisy or other forms of excuses. Her words are intense, and so is her work, which differs from most contemporary political art in two respects: “number one, it’s political, and number two, it’s art.” (Jackson, 2014: 16).

Irena Haiduk was born in Serbia in the early 1980’s. The Balkan war (especially the NATO bombing of Belgrade in 1999), the countries’ (economic) transition from communism, to socialism, to neoliberalism, and her negative experience of waiting and hoping versus the positive, productive force of work are reflected repeatedly in her projects. She is sceptical of anything shiny and tries to undo the meanings we give to things. For example, in *Seductive Exacting Realism (SER)*,

Irena Haiduk unveils the neoliberal mechanisms of market expansion behind social movements such as CANVAS – the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies that has been involved in the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine as well as the Arab Spring. In another project, she challenges our ‘love of art’ by highlighting the shallowness of much of contemporary art that she refers to as ‘polite art’ in her 2013 project *Bon Ton Mais Non*.

“Polite art creates needs that are satisfied immediately”. It “farts quietly” and “looks at you quizzically, surprised by your presence, like a deer in the headlights”. Polite art “asks for permission so it does not have to apologize later”. “Polite art is like a dog, fetching a stick for the master to throw again. Cats are another matter entirely. A cat kills a mouse, chews its head into a bloody stump, and presents it to the master. You can’t throw that.” (*Bon Ton Mais Non*, 2013).

Irena Haiduk has no interest in making art that is critical. Instead, her work aspires to be “*art that kills*” (Jackson, 2014: 14). It creates a disturbing atmosphere similar to Andrei Tarkovsky’s films *Stalker* or *Solaris* (Jackson, 2014: 16), unwilling to grant the catharsis that much of contemporary art offers “like a refreshing, steamy ethical shower before you blow dry, deodorize, and put on your uniform for another day of service in the on-going privatization of the world” (Jackson, 2014: 16).

Well aware of the fact that contemporary capitalism permanently asks for and produces provocation to get attention, to cause surprise, and to break with conventions, Irena Haiduk might well be a rising star. She is getting increasing recognition among highbrow artistic circles and works from a privileged position, with invitations from the prestigious Renaissance Society in Chicago as well as Documenta XIV in Athens and Kassel, to name but a few. Irena Haiduk’s work has enormous intellectual appeal. Her ability to deconstruct and provoke feeds the art world’s image as a disruptive force. She explores contemporary life under capitalism in a direct, undaunted way, engaging again and again with management and organization studies. Her themes include exploitative and precarious working conditions, work-life balance, immaterial and aesthetic labour, the commodification of art and enchantment, the colonialization and transformation of economies, and market expansion and growth under neoliberalism. In many instances, Haiduk’s position might best be described as critical management studies in artistic guise.

Central to this essay is the notion of hope. By introducing the reader to selected works by Irena Haiduk, we first explore her portrayal of hope as 'whore'. In a second step, we contrast the negative connotations of hope by linking it to research that explores the role of hope in contemporary life under capitalism, especially as it unfolds in the post-socialist societies in the Balkans. In so doing, we juxtapose the critical reading of hope put forward by Haiduk with anthropological notions of hope and conclude that hope is vital for re-imagining and practicing economic, societal, and inter-personal alternative worlds. In the concluding section, we reflect upon Haiduk's practice of voicing critique through negation and question what critique can achieve in the quest for alternative worlds. Here, the emphasis shifts from critiquing the *actualities* of managerial practices to exploring the *potentialities* of alternative worldviews, while emphasizing the potential of affirmative forms of critique that acknowledge the affective, moral, and existential valence of hope.

## HOPE AS WHORE: HAIDUK'S CRITIQUE I

The Balkan saying 'hope is the greatest whore' features prominently in Irena Haiduk's work. Her position is critical in that she claims that hope functions as disciplinary, subjectifying force that ensnares people into a continually passive state of waiting—waiting for a better job, a better economic situation, a better life. The notion of hope is reduced to a simple equation: hoping=senseless waiting=wasting.

«IH: Hope is the vehicle of waiting. ... By ridding oneself of hope one rids oneself of the cruelty of waiting. It allows for realism, which is not pessimism, but a dark kind of optimism «

(Irena Haiduk in interview with Monika Scewczyk, 2015: 243)

Haiduk's understanding of hope shows parallels to Laurent Berlant's notion of 'cruel optimism', which captures the self-deluding nature of promises and prospects often used to provide meaning or a sense of purpose for people to keep on living, to keep on doing what they do, and to "look forward to being in the world" (2010: 94) - despite the fact that the hoped-for conditions might actually threaten the well-being of the subject or group of people. The attachment to the object of desire is thus highly problematic (i.e. cruel). Critically speaking, optimism, like hope, serves as 'technologies of patience' (Berlant, 1997: 222). Both have the capacity to undo resistance and lure individuals, groups, or whole countries into

indefinite periods of waiting – for the empty promise of prosperity and a better life. They create situations in which exploitation, precariousness, and injustice are sustained instead of resisted. Hope and optimism work as whores.

First starring in Irena Haiduk's work *Nine Hour Delay* (NHD, 2012-2058), the notion that 'hope is the greatest whore' is also central in her recent installation *Seductive Exacting Realism* (SER, 2015-ongoing) and featured prominently on the book cover of the 80-point manifesto against polite art (*Bon Ton Mais Non*, 2013), which was part of the display at the interactive candy store *Bon Bon Bon Ton: Balkan Outlet* (2016) at Art Basel, Miami.

According to Haiduk, her work *Nine Hour Delay* puts capitalism on hold. It re-invigorates the 'work uniform' to clearly separate working time from leisure time, a separation that has become obsolete under the new spirit of capitalism. Work is present anytime, anywhere. 24/7. Life is work, because work has become our life. Most of us have bought into this. It has been our choice.

At the center of NHD is the Borosana shoe, an ergonomic shoe developed in the 60's by female workers at the Borovo factory in former Yugoslavia, now Croatia. The shoes are good for nine hours of working (involving standing or walking). It was very successful and mass produced. 'The utilitarian design in service of the working woman'. However, when communism was in decline, the shoe was withdrawn from mass production and fabrication terminated in 1991 when the region became a war zone.

For *Nine Hour Delay*, Irena Haiduk has produced the Borosana shoe anew. Each time the project is exhibited, the Borosana shoe becomes the official work shoe of the host institution. The wearer is required to sign the Borosana check-out form, promising to wear the shoe only at work, respecting the boundary between labor and leisure time (see below). By requiring a signature, the work turns the passive consumer into an active one: We have to buy into the contract, make a choice. It disables us to say that we didn't know about it.

In the context of art institutions, in which Irena Haiduk's work is usually displayed, the shoe does not only call into question work's boundlessness under the new work spirit, but also the notion of 'immaterial' labor, the communicative or aesthetic labor that produces and

provides value ‘for free’ to the art institution, exemplifying the cultural worker as the new precariat.

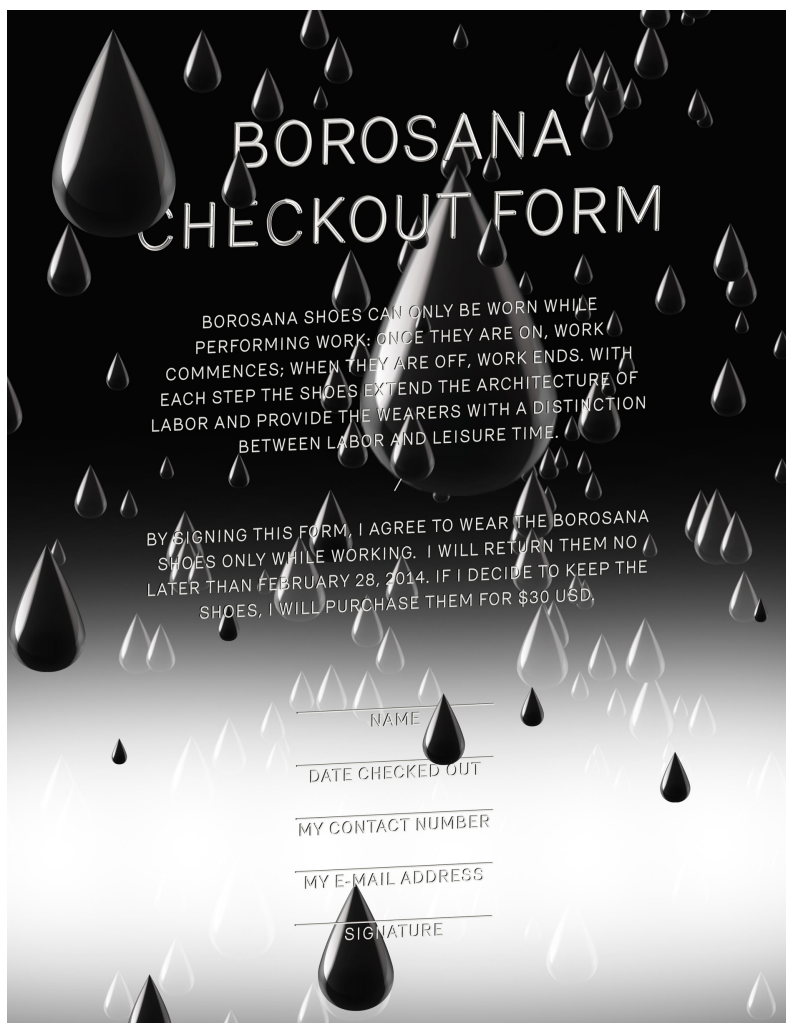
The uniform shoe demonstrates work’s materiality and the opposition to endless labor hours.

Resuming the production of the show also allows for parts of Yugoslavia to persist and resist neoliberal privatization.

“Borovo remains one of the last public Yugoslav infrastructures. The inability to legally split and privatize the company’s public assets prevents Yugoslavia from fully formally splitting to this day. With every new step Yugoslavia persists (insists).» (Irena Haiduk)

(Citations taken from *Realismically speaking* - Irena Haiduk by Monika Scewczyk (2015)

<https://irenahaiduk.com/work>; <https://yugoexport.com>)



Irena Haiduk, Borosana Checkout Form (2013)

*Nine Hour Delay* emphasizes the productive force of production, of taking action and finding innovative ways, versus the passive, paralyzing state of hope. Production allows for liberation from hope and, at the same time, serves as demonstration: by wearing the shoe, we tell time, mark time, and put capitalism on hold.

At the same time, the Borosana shoe disavows hope by reorienting one's hope into the past. Nostalgia is 'a retrospective utopia' (Velikonja, 2009), a slew of utopian hopes and wistful exclamations. Haiduk herself mobilizes nostalgia for a socialist paradise lost, which results in unfulfilled hopes that a better, more fulfilling life and just world are possible. But there is no hope. Neither for post-socialist nor capitalist workers, as the hope of work liberation exemplified by wearing the Borosana shoe for work only (as used to be the norm under socialism) is no longer an option, because the shoe has now become a fashion icon. Therefore, the conditions of hope immanent in the re-production of the Borosana shoe is compromised, if not corrupted.

In ***Seductive Exacting Realism (SER)***, an on-going work by Irena Haiduk, the Borosana shoe reappears on the feet of the Sirens, and the saying 'hope is the greatest whore' also returns.

SER is an installation that consists of a waiting room, a dark (blind) room, and a sound program. Before entering the dark room, the audience is put 'on hold' in the waiting room (for up to 30 minutes). The actual dark room that one is allowed to enter after the waiting period, turns out to be empty. An object-less, art-less gallery, except for eight women – Sirens - who seem suspended in the air, in darkness. Instead of hearing a Sirens' song, the sound program that is played consists of a reproduced conversation that took place between Irena Haiduk and Srda Popovic, one of the former leaders of the non-violent student movement that contributed to displacing Slobodan Milosevic. The movement later became known as CANVAS – the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (<http://canvasopedia.org/>). Popovic is one of the main consultants who helped ignite revolutions around the world. In 2013, it was revealed that CANVAS was commissioned by Stratfor (<https://www.stratfor.com>) – a geopolitical platform and think tank that advocates major American corporate interests, including military, banking, and security industries (SER-a conversation 00:37:25).

The conversation between Haiduk and Popovic circles around the question of revolution and revolutionary art, the structural and financial equivalences between an artist and a consultant, and the production of history, including hope and repeated failure. Art, like the political movement CANVAS,

seems not to have any revolutionary capacity. "It doesn't change anything. ... The superstructure he [Popovic] wants to change gets replaced or even reproduced; it is one form of alienation exchanged for another" (SER-a conversation 00:46:08).

At some point during the conversation, the two voices switch places. She becomes him, and he becomes her. It happens when the conversation addresses how both, the artist and the activist-consultant, are partially funded by the same sources. For Irena Haiduk, it was a deliberate choice to seek funding for this project from the same body that finances CANVAS. Her action intends to demonstrate how the art world and political movements are selling themselves to the same financial entities. The art world – another whore.

"CANVAS has trained pro-democracy movements in fifty countries; many of these resistance movements have succeeded, only to bring about indefinite periods of transition, leaving the citizens forever waiting in a political no-man's-land." (Introduction - 00:05:25)

"Sirens are divine creatures whose singing and silence is irresistible. In some versions of the myth, Sirens are cannibals, but most contemporary scholarship explains that they simply don't need to eat because they're divine. The sailors do not nourish them; instead, the Sirens waste the sailors to death by immobilizing them by waiting. CANVAS leaves behind a similar state of waiting in countries where it operates, whether in Ukraine, Burma, Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey, Ukraine, Syria, or Iran. The benefits of idealized capitalism and dreamt-of democracy seem imminent but they never arrive. These countries are left to waste" (SER -a conversation 00:39:35).

CANVAS is "implicated in a neo-colonial project which traffics in stabilizing markets, whatever degree of structural violence is entailed, under the neo-liberally non-specific banner of social change; a sort of 'revolutionary management' of the kind analyzed by Boltanski and Chiapello and available in many airport bookshops" (Marina Vishmidt, 01:05:02)

"CANVAS initiates a hope that the benefits of capitalism will arrive" 00:41:43 "And in the waiting rooms of SER the audience is experiencing the state of waiting, although at a very polite scale" 00:42:00). SER illustrates life under capitalism as a life in waiting rooms

“in capital’s mansion of slow death” (Marina Vishmidt, 01:15:00).

Seductive Exacting Realism develops its force by putting us into a state of blindness. “In blindness one cannot tell the difference between an inanimate thing and a living thing”. You can’t be sure if something is dead or alive. Because the usual processes of looking are superseded by blindness and listening, different rules apply. We are in the dark. “En.dark.ment” (Hannah Feldmann, 01:30:05) as counter-practice to enlightenment.

(Citations taken from *Seductive Exacting Realism* (2016). In particular, *SER – A conversation*, Irena Haiduk & Solveig Ovstebo, 2016; *The rules of the game*, Hannah Feldman 2016; *Introduction*, Solveig Ovstebo, 2016; *Time longer than rope*, Marina Vishmidt, 2016).

The artistic demonstration of *SER* is complex, uncomfortable, inconvenient. It asks a lot of its audience. Despite the darkness, there is no place to hide. Once the audience understands what they hear and see, they have no excuses left. The triumph of emptiness is how some management scholars have described our ‘dark times’, where image, identity, and brands have become core to our lives. In Irena Haiduk’s *SER*, we find a similar emptiness (the dark, empty gallery). But there is also a way forward, be it intended by Haiduk or not. Blinding us, the installation actually provides the opportunity to see and understand. Hope does not necessarily equal naiveté or blind trust in ‘the mastering power’s authority’, in the images, visuals, logos - but in our own productive force, in our ability to question, listen, and see ‘in darkness’.

More time, even if it is waiting time, might turn out to be an opportunity from which ideas for alternatives can emerge. In contemporary worlds of work, time for waiting has become a rare thing. Sitting in darkness, with nothing to do (no responsibility, duty, or task) might actually turn into a shimmer of light for life under capitalism.

## **COUNTERPOINT I - AGAINST OSTENTATIOUS DESIRE: CULTIVATING ORDINARY HOPE**

There is a flipside to the cruel, corrupting, and compromising force of hope put forward by Haiduk. The seductive realism of waiting and the forced entrapment in a limbo, in the disciplinary state of perpetual ‘becoming’ and



'transitioning' towards a radiant 'capitalist paradise-found' transpires on the ground as an incessant mundane struggle for 'a normal life'. Hope is more often than not about the miniscule daily battles and infinitesimally small pleasures: sipping on a glass of wine after work, working in the garden over the weekend, taking a short vacation, having faith in health, or experiencing happiness with friends (see Alacovska, 2018a). Jansen (2015), in his long-term ethnography of an apartment building in post-socialist Bosnia, concludes that people get through life in war-torn and impoverished societies by upholding 'yearnings in the meanwhile', yearnings that were captured in the ubiquitous and deceptively straightforward adage: 'I just want a normal life'. Such a quest for a normal life then does not merely represent a bold projection of or speculation about future positive states, which can potentially result in defeatism, resignation, and melancholy. To the contrary, it gives shape to the horizon of the thinkable and doable, but also the liveable in certain spatio-temporal circumstances. But Jansen, similarly to Haiduk, only captures the ever-receding horizon of hope which forfeits or cancels out coherent and meaningful future prospects in post-socialism: "Yearning" denotes a persistent longing. It is continuous and prolonged, and its object is known to be out of reach' (2015: 54-55). For Jansen, the inhabitants of post-socialism are entrapped in 'a meanwhile' (Haiduk's 'waiting room'), stripped of their futures and robbed of their pasts.

However, cultivating hope in conditions of post-socialist radical uncertainties and predicaments does not imply succumbing to the illusory and fatalistic power of presentism or self-abandonment in longing and escapism (Alacovska, 2018a). Hope is about turning to the practicalities of the present moment through joy about the future, rather than with a well-honed strategic 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1998). It is even less a well-defined and rehearsed set of tactics to capture the objective possibilities of present structures (Bourdieu, 1998). In post-socialism, hope is enacted through the vitality of the future. The future is appropriated in the present moment by reimagining the present via the future (Miyazaki, 2006). According to Pedersen (2012: 10), the present moment is imbued with the virtual potentialities and hyper-temporal (not merely strategic, pre-planned, or consequential) possibilities of their actualization. Therefore, Pedersen argues that people in post-socialism actually 'practise hope' precisely by refusing to accept the linear (Western, capitalist) chronology of time and its logic of accretion, acceleration, and aspiration. Rather, they embrace the unpredictability of the future in a variety of actions, acts,

and movements which are not introspective or cognitive, but distinctly outward-oriented, social, shared, and imaginative.

The actualization of hope does not imply strenuous planning or neurotic stressing about future outcomes, as much as reinvigorating, continuing, and cherishing the sociality of the hopeful moment in whatever irrational, accidental, or haphazard guise it may come. Similarly, Jeffrey who studied India's unemployed youth concludes that 'waiting' is not simply a numbing state of imprisonment into the millenarian presentism, but is effectuated in "mundane forms of mobilization. ... Educated unemployed young men often advance their goals—be they reactionary or progressive—along relatively hidden pathways, in everyday social life through cultivating relationships" (2010: 16).

*Seductive Exacting Realism* convincingly demonstrate how history and the world are made in conversation (00:46:08). It addresses the art world's revolutionary desires and its dark complicity, presenting art as 'Sirens who try to seduce us, capture, and absorb us'. At the same time, however, it exemplifies resistance to dominant powers and conventional modes of seeing. Hope seems appropriate. When entering the darkness of SER, Hannah Feldman notes, "you should not feel lost at sea, a victim of a seductive, exacting realism that shows you nothing. You will see no labels, no wall texts, no transcripts, no titles, not paintings, and certainly not much light. Your eyes will make darkness and from it, the real" (Hannah Feldman, 01:47:09).

## SELLING HOPE IN A SILVER LINING: HAIDUK'S CRITIQUE II

Chocolate: Sweet childhood pleasure and object of desire. Even as adults, we often associate chocolate with a soothing, comforting effect. Chocolate as reward, compensation, positive outlook. Giving somebody chocolate as a way to take away our anxieties and make the waiting less painful. The materialization of hope in the form of chocolate is perhaps best captured by the former Yugoslavian, Zagreb-based Kraš confectionery, which marketed one of their chocolate bars under the name 'hope' (<http://www.chocolatewrappers.info/Vevropa/Kras/hrnada1.jpg>). This way, the saying 'hope is the greatest whore' resurfaces in Irena Haiduk's interactive candy store *Bon Bon Bon Ton: Balkan Outlet* in which chocolate candy made by Kraš was on sale (along with books and pamphlets).

The candies for sale in Haiduk's *Balkan Outlet* are based on different recipes that are linked to different ideological epochs: the Austro-Hungarian Empire, fascism, communism,

socialism, and transitional capitalism. Haiduk's installation offers the products in an interactive, engaging way: To purchase the products, the customers need to fill out a questionnaire (see below) and provide information concerning their income level (lower, middle, upper), stress or the weight they carry on their shoulders (low, middle, high), as well as ideological preferences (imperialism, fascism, communism/socialism, capitalism). This information is then used to decide which candy the customer will receive and at what price.

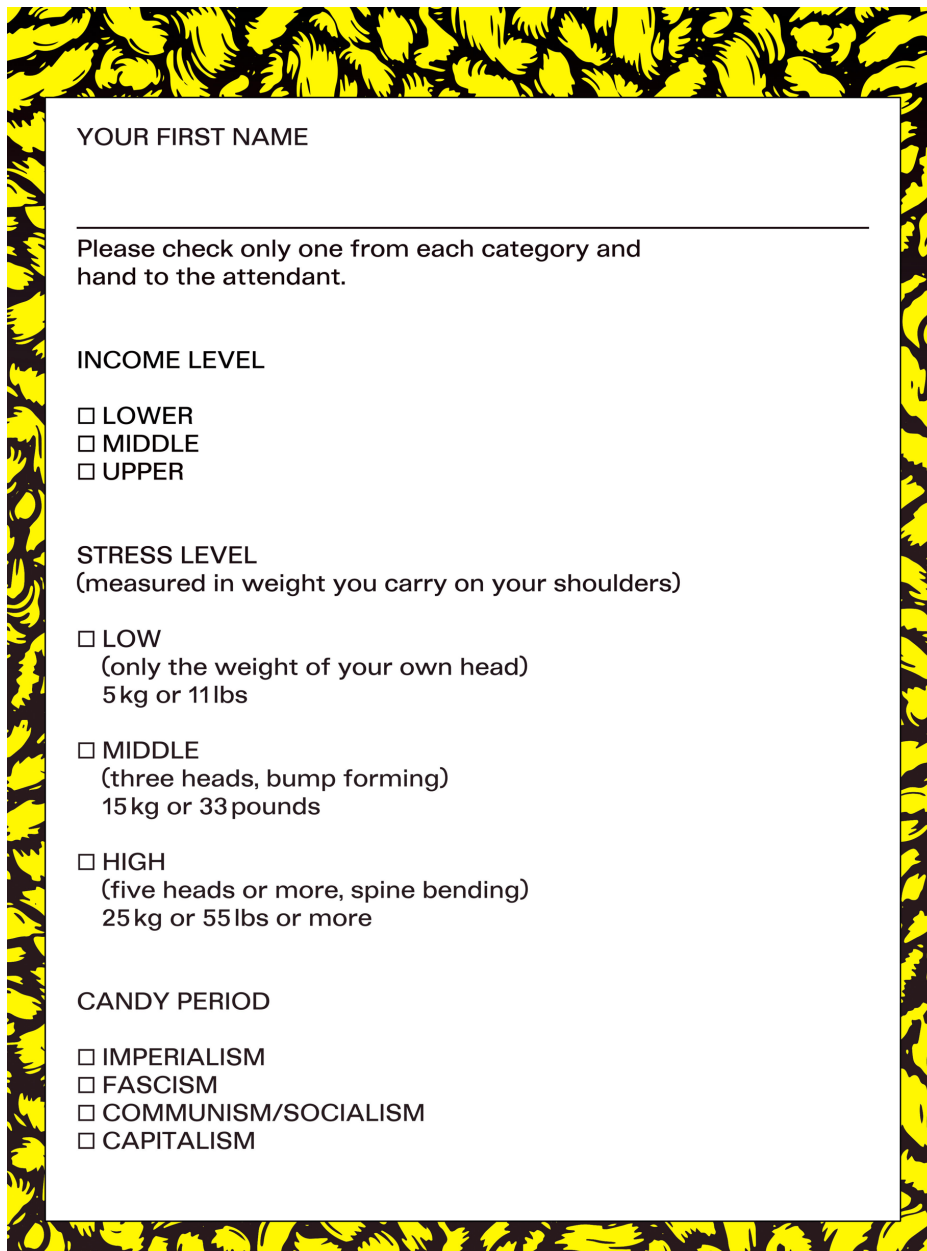
"The Balkan outlet specializes in the mouth. The mouth can ingest and incorporate most things and releases only the voice." (Irena Haiduk)

"All books and candies are categorized and priced by weight, instilling various degrees of corruption and levity. The transaction process is augmented by flexible price calculation."

"Transforming the act of consumption into a reflection of one's political beliefs is a cleverly calculated move in a cultural time of political unrest and shown at an event that is perhaps the epitome of ostentatious capitalism, results that are in line with Haiduk's goal for her project: 'The main thing I wanted the project to do is serve inequality back in an engaging way.'" (Irena Haiduk)

(Citations taken from <https://artbasel.com> and <https://creators.vice.com>)

As is the case in *Nine Hour Delay*, the *Balkan Outlet* involves the audience and forces the consumer to choose a stance (politically, financially, conscience-wise). It demonstrates how our own desire to do good might turn out to be wrong (price calculation) and how attempts to take advantage of the system (information about income and carried weight) feed corruption. Haiduk tries to show that hope, or chocolate, represents the means by which things are covered up. Chocolate also epitomizes fast commodity consumption of the type that is blind to its production. By consuming chocolate, we keep hope - and with it the unjust system - alive.



YOUR FIRST NAME

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Please check only one from each category and hand to the attendant.

INCOME LEVEL

☐ LOWER  
☐ MIDDLE  
☐ UPPER

STRESS LEVEL  
(measured in weight you carry on your shoulders)

☐ LOW  
(only the weight of your own head)  
5 kg or 11lbs

☐ MIDDLE  
(three heads, bump forming)  
15kg or 33 pounds

☐ HIGH  
(five heads or more, spine bending)  
25 kg or 55lbs or more

CANDY PERIOD

☐ IMPERIALISM  
☐ FASCISM  
☐ COMMUNISM/SOCIALISM  
☐ CAPITALISM

Irena Haiduk, *Bon Bon Bon Ton (3 Bons, 1 Ton)* (Fall 2016)  
Graphic design by HelloMe.

## COUNTERPOINT II - THE VITALISTIC POWER OF CONCRETE HOPE

The rational approach of unmasking hope and optimism through critical analysis (Berlant, 2005 – Haiduk included) reveals a bleak picture: a soul-corrupting and character-eroding force of hope. This form of critique depends on reduction and simplification. Exercising critique by turning a positive into something negative without exploring the ambivalences and subtle nuances necessarily strips off the vitalistic, enabling, and moral force that hope offers.

Scholars of post-socialism (Jansen, 2015; Lindquist, 2005; Pedersen, 2012; Zigon, 2009) have shown that hope springs as the most visceral force in conditions of radical uncertainties, where political power is overwhelming and economic conditions are depressing, all of which limit an individual's scope of agency. Hope makes life bearable amidst conditions of ontological distress, economic failure, institutional dysfunction, and protracted financial crises. Getting through these conditions 'requires methods of existential reassurance and control that rational and technical means cannot offer' (Lindquist, 2005: 2). To keep on going, we need something that lies beyond critical rational analysis. Hope is survival, a moral injunction, a resolution to endure even in the face of the most trying of conditions.

This type of hope, however, is not an 'abstract hope' of the theological kind, which promises the utopian future bliss of salvation (Crapanzano, 2004), or the daydreaming type, which has no bearing on reality as it serves as a tool for escapism and subjugation (Jansen, 2015). This is the type of hope criticized by Haiduk and Berlant. Hope that is moral, active, and vitalistic is 'a concrete hope' (Crapanzano, 2004) which transpires in the vernacular, intentional, and moral acts of going about life even in spite of adversities, disruptions, and radical uncertainties. Such hope is then observable not in the grand (seductive!) narratives of utopian futures, but 'through a descent into the ordinary' (Jansen, 2015). If the 'grand hope'-fulfilling horizon retracts quickly from the post-socialist experiences of transition (as instantiated for example in the ever-remote prospect of accession to the European Union, the ever-deluding conversion from state socialism into a capitalist 'hyperconsumerist' society, or the ever-compromising promise of security and peace), there still remains a powerful orientation towards ordinary, concrete hope, the *hic et nunc*. If long-term planning was crippled by the never-ending 'timepass' of waiting (Jeffrey, 2010), hope emerges as 'living for the present': "These are the people with resolute commitment to the present moment as a vitalistic engagement with the future: hope transforms 'this short term into a transcendent escape from time itself'" (Day, Papataxiarchis, and Stewart, 1999: 3).

Ordinary, concrete hope then is about *not giving up* while actually *giving up*, that is resisting, the Siren call of the chocolate-hope, wrapped—seductively—in a silver lining.

## HOPE AS PRODUCTIVE LABOUR

Despite Haiduk's ostensibly critical position towards hope, her artistic practice can be interpreted as hopeful. According to Haiduk herself, she does not tend towards cynicism, pessimism, or optimism, but towards realism. Hope under realism is not naïve. It does not follow the ideology of positive psychology, which suggests that when we optimize ourselves, good things will happen, and not as cruel optimism that helps us tolerate and wait out exploitative and precarious working conditions. It posits hope as realism or 'dark optimism' as suggested in SER. It comes as the courage to look 'behind the curtain' to question and understand mechanisms of power, exploitation, colonialism, and neoliberalism. And not to despair, become cynical, or buy into it, but to find the energy to resist, restore agency, and reclaim power. Hope under realism is productive and not paralyzing, as Haiduk suggests.

"Hope always involves some sort of action in the world. This action invariably is undertaken with – and through – other people, and in that sense it may be described as irreducibly social" (Pedersen, 2012: 11).

Hope is "a distinct and quite respectable form of labour". (Pedersen, 2012: 12).

The presentist attitude to life (insulated in a subjective states of being) morphs into collectively upheld practices of hope, once the possibility of post-socialism (that is post-precariousness, post-hardship, and post-adversity) has been cancelled out. In such conditions, hope emerges as informal labour practice, a practice of community economies, and socially engaged work (Alacovska, 2018b). Given the absence of capital, inaccessible loans, dysfunctional institutional systems, and the absence of labour protection, hope transpires through embedding the impossibility of work into relational infrastructures, such as neighbourhoods, local communities, kinship, or families that render viable and vital the informal labour practices of barter, favour-swapping, in-kind payments, or community provisioning (see Fernandez et al. 2017). Hope is actualized in a present moment through a diverse array of informal labour practices. Mutual help and reciprocity as voluntary or humanitarian work instantiate hope as a social practice distributed throughout the community. 'The work of hope' in this sense also forges 'spaces of hope' (Harvey, 2000) as social arenas where resistance to capitalism flourishes (for example through the sharing of economic resources as common good, the socialization of risk

and labour, or the informalization of work), despite the fact that those spaces often take place within existing capitalism (Anderson, 2006). Hope imbues concrete action for constructing viable alternatives.

Instead of dismissing hope as a disciplining tool for subjugating inert, docile, and despondent post-socialist subjects, hope's potency for political action and active re-imagination of the capitalist economies deserves attention (Harvey, 2000). While Irena Haiduk repeatedly stresses the productive force of labour that *makes* things (vs. the passive state of hope-imbued waiting), she misses the point that hope is productive labour as well. Hope makes a difference 'for real'.

## **CONCLUSION: FROM CRITIQUE OF HOPE TO HOPEFUL CRITIQUE**

Strong words get attention.

Provocation sells.

Critique feeds capitalism.

This is true for the art world as much as it is true for the academic world of management studies. Critique, in both fields, tends to rely on negation and deconstruction. Eloquent, highly intellectual, and stimulating cynicism. From the critique, we understand, "the world *should* be otherwise" (Parker, 2010: 301). But how can we get there?

MS: Outside the space of the West, outside of the time of waiting, there seems to be a blind spot, or a dark space, which allows for a different dream. The question becomes how can this be imagined?

IH: Yes. (Irena Haiduk in conversation with Monika Scewczyk, 2015: 243).

Irena Haiduk's work is intriguing and sharp. But her portrayal of hope seems to be a way to provoke and get attention rather than provide viable ways forward. By 'sucking the life out of things', she turns objects, institutions, and people into pieces of art (SER-a conversation 00:57:58). She deconstructs and criticizes, and rightly so. But is critique, is 'killing it' enough?

In his review of the Oxford Handbook of Critical Management Studies, Parker (2010) reflects on the potential of critical perspectives to actually provide insights into how to make alternative worlds available. 'Sclerotic criticism', to use Parker's (2010) expression, does not lead us far, because it

tends to harden the life-enabling arteries for thought and practice. Art that kills and sclerotic criticism: death everywhere. How to resuscitate the dead?

Critique and critical perspectives are necessary. There can be no doubt about it. Increasingly, scholars are looking for ways to voice critique that moves beyond merely criticizing the status quo (e.g. Alakavuklar, 2018; Ashcraft, 2017; Parker, Cheney, Fournier & Land, 2014c; Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2009). For example, Parker, Cheney, Fournier, and Land (2014b) propose a manifesto that assembles some general principles for organizing alternatives, including autonomy, solidarity, and responsibility as well as the complex dynamics underpinning such alternatives. Kokkinidis (2015) in his illustration of workers' collectives in Greece highlights how everyday practices of reciprocity and collectivity can create 'spaces of possibilities' that not only criticize existing forms of work, but put into practice more egalitarian and autonomous working conditions. And Fernandez, Marti and Farchi (2017) highlight the power of neighbourhood practices and interventions that constitute hopeful "mundane and everyday politics" in redistributing power and agency to those who are deemed powerless. In the art world, artists experiment with 'co-operative' ways of working as 'a radical pre-figurative political project' (Sandoval, 2016) to actively fight off precarity. New practices of work are established outside the regular regimes of signification and representation and even markets (which govern much of contemporary conceptual art) such as publishing artistic work under pseudonyms, so as not to commodify one's work and not turn oneself into a brand (e.g. Autonomous Artists Anonymous, 2017), or producing 'art money' as alternative community currencies for the creation of hopeful, even utopian enclaves in the commoditized global art market (Banks, 2011).

These examples illustrate: We do have choices (a theme present also in Haiduk's work). We just need to seize them. This implies looking for and identifying possibilities for alternatives 'already present' (Parker, 2014: 367). *Insurgent entrepreneurship* is how Parker et al. (2014a) define this ability to transform "our daily practices and the way we live" (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004: 3). Compared to the traditional forms of critique as we know it in management studies, it is a "more open, active, and experimental form of positive critique which brings new things into the world" (Parker et al., 2014a: 368).

Instead of voicing critique from an elite outside perspective that keeps a critical (cynical) distance, this form of *nouvelle critique* (Hjorth, 2017) engages actively and affirmatively with the world we live in and tries to create alternatives from within. It puts the focus on people's agency



and the small difference we can make while not losing sight of the 'bigger picture' that is in need of transformation.

Hope is constitutive for this form of critique. Hope mobilizes. It sustains the momentum that often reclines after activation and protest have passed their peaks. It bridges the moment of waiting and motivates the mundane and everyday politics that make up the social transformation on a local level (Fernandez et al., 2017). Hope is potent; it cajoles into action. It does not kill, but contributes to "the cultivation of contemporary possibilities" in the here and now (Parker, 2017: 934).

Whether we call it affirmative critique, critique nouvelle (Hjorth, 2017), or critical performativity (Huault, Kärreman, Perrot, and Spicer, 2017; Spicer et al., 2009), the form of critique we are advocating here lives on hope. It tries to 'breathe life into things', instead of draining (Parker's critique of CMS) or 'sucking' it out (our critique of Haiduk). As Maeckelberg (2011) in her treatment of developing alternative political structures through prefiguration argues: Doing is believing. To imagine alternatives means to engage in hope as productive labour. Hope works. It nurtures potentialities. Sitting in darkness without hope would be a different story altogether.

"Hope is one human quality we are bound never to lose without losing our humanity. But we may be similarly certain that a safe haven in which to drop its anchor will take a very long time to be found. You, like the rest of us, know all about the fate of the little shepherd who cried wolf once too often... a similar fate awaits anyone of us who cries once too often, ... 'the promised land ahead!'" (Zygmunt Bauman in conversation with David Lyon, 2013: 125-126).

Critique that wishes to make alternative worlds available is a labour of hope. Luckily, 'hope dies last' - as another saying suggests.

## **POST-SCRIPT**

Yugoexport (an oral corporation that was founded by Irena Haiduk) took the time to respond to the arguments expressed in this essay. They state:

«We are about building infrastructures and we are about mobilizing production. Critique is always polite, so we're not interested in it. There are kinds of hope like there are kinds of waiting; kinds that "mobilize" and "cultivate." But we think that, rather than stretch "hope" to encompass its opposite, we can give another name to what is not about waiting, what is not about critiquing, but is about building infrastructures, mobilizing and maintaining them. That name is love.»

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## Other resources

<https://www.artbasel.com/catalog/artwork/47060/Irena-Haiduk-Bon-Bon-Bon-Ton-3-Bon-1-Ton-Balkan-Outlet>

<https://artsceneathens.com/2017/03/30/documenta-14s-borosana-shoes/>

[https://creators.vice.com/en\\_us/article/aenxjp/candy-store-croatian-history-lessons-art-basel](https://creators.vice.com/en_us/article/aenxjp/candy-store-croatian-history-lessons-art-basel)

<https://irenahaiduk.com/work>

<https://yugoexport.com/>

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